

W
600
H6597
1849

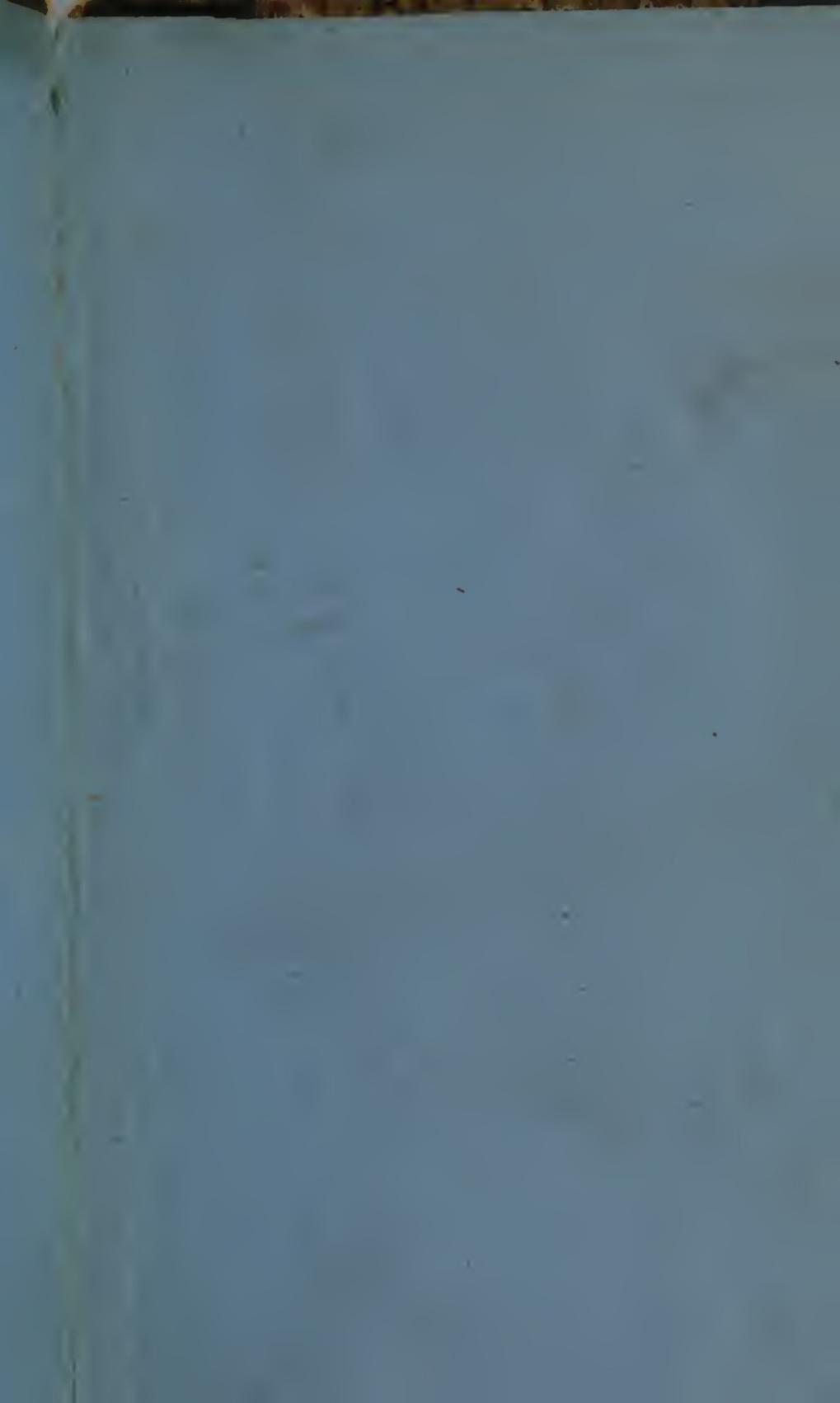


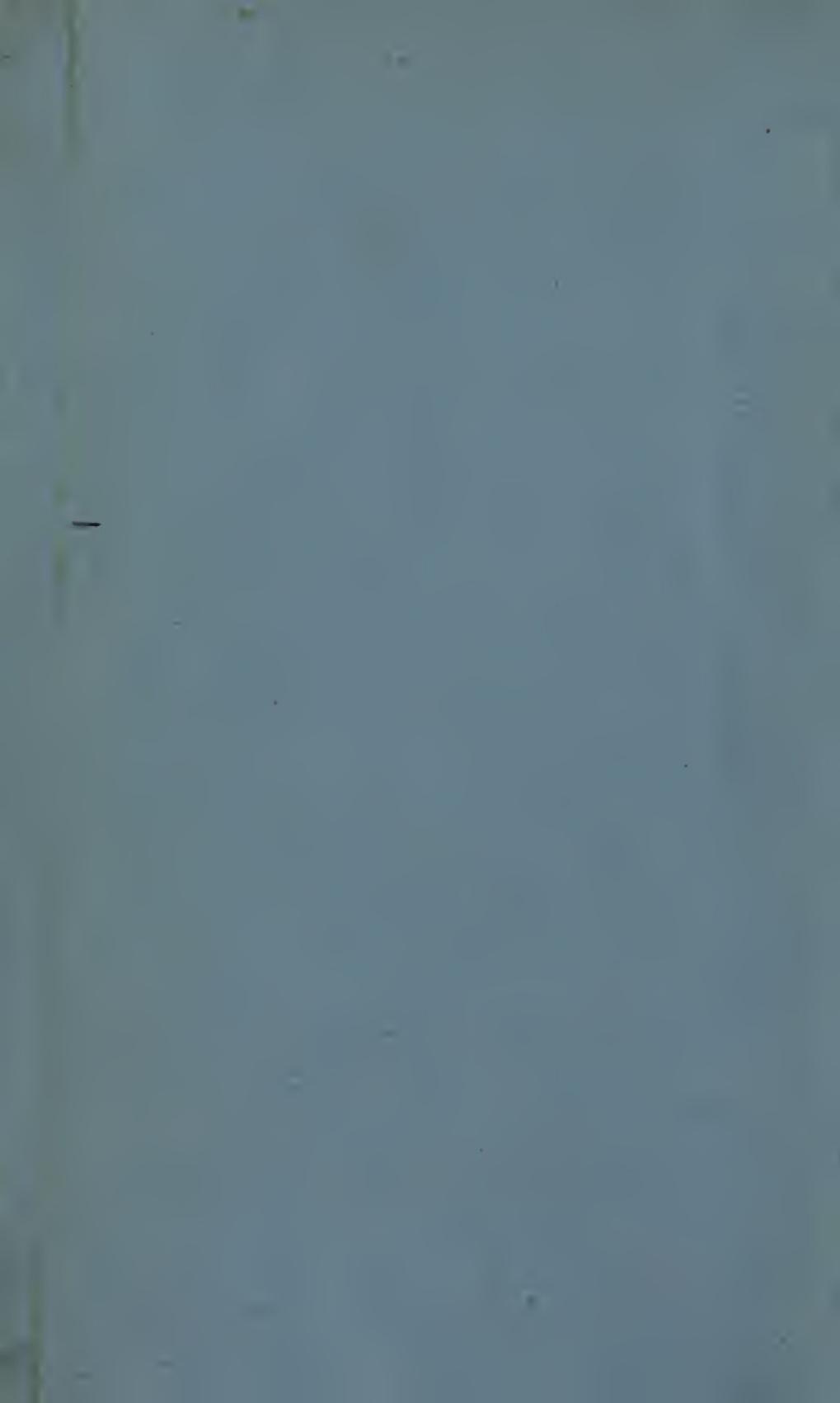
Surgeon General's Office

LIBRARY

Section,

No. 29831





HINCHMAN'S TRIAL,
✓

CONSIDERED

IN ITS

RELATION TO THE PUBLIC.

by C. L. Webb
M.R.C.S. G.

27.31

PHILADELPHIA:

1849.

W
600
H659t
1849
c 1

HOW TO CHOOSE A FAMILY DOCTOR.

To choose a physician well, one should be half a physician one's self: but as this is not the case with many, the best plan which can be adopted is to select a man whose education has been suitable to his profession; whose habits of life are such as prove that he continues to acquire both practical and theoretical knowledge;—who is neither a bigot in old opinions, nor an enthusiast in new;—and for many reasons, not the fashionable doctor of the day. A little attention in making the necessary inquiries will suffice to ascertain the requisites here specified; to which should be added, what are to be found in medical men of real worth, those qualities which may serve to render him an agreeable companion; for the family physician should always be the family friend.

BY A FRIEND OF THINE.

HINCHMAN'S TRIAL

CONSIDERED

IN ITS RELATION TO THE PUBLIC.

In the "Public Ledger" of the 14th April 1849, appeared an editorial article relative to the case of Morgan Hinchman. The worthy editor says: "Leaving the question of Morgan Hinchman's sanity or insanity to the jury, we cannot omit to record our unqualified detestation of any technical type of insanity in the medical schools, as the groundwork of confinement in a mad-house. We detest all doctrines of partial or moral insanity. If a citizen can be consigned to the cells of a lunatic asylum at the mere request of friends or the advice of relatives, there will be an end of that personal security which forms the basis of freedom; for a case can hardly be imagined in which it would not be easy to procure the signature of a physician for a malady so equivocal and fluctuating in its symptoms as 'partial' or 'moral' insanity, a disease that embraces so very large a proportion of the human family, and which could, therefore, receive the certificate of any member of the faculty without much danger of 'going wrong.' As in this case, so in all others, the imputation of insanity being followed by the deprivation of property, the change involves the blighted prospects of a whole life, and the misery of an offspring doomed to the suspicion of hereditary disease the most terrific and appalling. It ought to be made, therefore, only under a certainty of its existence in a positive and complete form. Partial or moral insanity ought, in no event, to subject a man to deprivation of liberty and property. An act of legislation ought to de-

nounce it. Public opinion ought to scout it from society. Partial insanity is the disease of mankind, not of an individual. Hence the absurdity of the doctrine, and the injustice of the treatment, which, in some cases, it has received. Technical insanity in the medical schools will not do to bring into the active concerns of life."

Since the publication of the foregoing manifesto, the sanity of Morgan Hinchman has been established by the verdict of the jury appointed to try his case; and in common with every honest and benevolent man, I sincerely congratulate both him and the public on the issue of this important trial.

But is it not a most startling fact, that a citizen of this country should have been confined in a lunatic asylum, on the mere plea of insanity, for the space of *six months* before he could obtain the inquiry which has resulted in proving his *sanity*? And should we not, instead of wasting our time in idle and mischievous declamation, tending only to prejudice the public against a most useful and honorable body of men, rather calmly and dispassionately inquire into this grievance, and endeavor to remedy it? Would it not be more advantageous if we inquire how it happens that the medical faculty are, with but few exceptions, ignorant of the forms of cerebral disorder? Why cannot lunatic asylums be open to the medical student under such proper restrictions as would preserve strict discipline, and prevent the possibility of any improprieties; thus affording the same opportunities of becoming acquainted with disorders of the mental functions, as at present are available for the study of other disorders? Should we not thus gradually provide for every part of this highly favored country, physicians as competent to treat insanity as they are at present to prescribe remedies for disorders of the bodily functions? I am sure that all reflecting minds will concur with me, that it will be more rational to do this, rather than to excite the prejudices of our fellow men, and thus lead them further into error and its consequences. I cannot agree with the editor of the *Ledger*, who says that all cases of partial or moral insanity should be left to take care of themselves. It is in the incipient stages of this terrible disorder that judicious medical and moral treatment is most effectual in alleviating, and in many

instances effecting a perfect cure. Would it be reasonable to deny the friends of the patient the privilege of seeking medical aid, until the disorder had permanently injured the mental faculties? By way of demonstrating the fallacy of such doctrine, I will describe a case of simple cerebral disorder, or, in other words, of partial insanity. Disease of the brain is not only called disease of the mind, but in too many instances still continues to be treated as such. It must be manifest to every reflecting mind, that the immaterial spirit, or, in other words, the immortal mind, cannot be subject to disease; because that which is subject to disease cannot be imminortal: as Christians, we need not the arguments of the metaphysician to convince us of this. Thus, then, it being proved that it is the brain, the organ by which the mind manifests itself, which is the seat of disease, and not the mind itself; and having emancipated our minds from that bugbear of civilized society, commonly called mental insanity, or madness; we shall, from this elevated position, lifted above the clouds of prejudice, be enabled distinctly to view the prospect which this vantage-ground displays to us. I repeat that it is a great error to consider cerebral disorder as mental; requiring, and, indeed, admitting only of moral remedies, instead of those forming only one class of curative agents; whereas the brain is the mere organ of mind, not the mind itself; and its disorder of function arises from its ceasing to be a proper medium for the manifestation of the varied action and passion of the presiding spirit or mind. And strange as it may seem, this error has been consecrated by a desire to escape from the fallacies of materialism; yet it is manifest that they alone are guilty of the charge of attachment to materialism, who consider the disorders of the cerebral function as mental; for then, indeed, the brain must be mind itself, and not simply its organ. When the stomach, or the liver, or the lungs are affected with disease, some term is employed which at once directs the attention to the suffering viscous, and to the mode of its sufferings. But when we speak of disorder of the cerebral function, persons currently employ the terms mental alienation, fatuity, and various others, which describe the symptoms of cerebral disease; but which do not lead the mind on to the affection of the

organ which occasions them. This cause is generally very little understood, and often mistaken. But we must bear in mind that the spiritual principle is not susceptible of disease, except speaking metaphorically, and therefore we must refer the symptoms of morbid mental manifestation to their organic cause.

And if these *mental* manifestations always become disordered in a morbid condition of the brain, it is not too much to infer that other analogous phenomena may be referred to this cause.

Cerebral disorder is characterized by certain symptoms which it is important to explain.

I will take an example of the simplest form of disturbance; namely, slight tendency to congestion in the vessels of the brain. The patient wakens with difficulty; he is desirous of sleeping beyond his usual time; he dresses with an oppression upon his brow, which renders volition irksome; he remains languid and feeble all the morning; there is a sense of weight in his head, which he cannot shake off; he remains drowsy and indisposed for exertion; the hour of dinner arrives, and the stimulus occasioned by this meal forces the blood through the congested vessels; reaction is produced; the sense of weight is lost, and is superseded by a headache of a more or less acute character; by restlessness, and a variety of fidgety sensations; and if the pain should subside towards evening (as it commonly does), still there remains a great degree of irritability, and the patient retires to bed in a state of morbid wakefulness, which does not subside for hours; and he relapses into the same heavy unrefreshing sleep, succeeded by a repetition of congestion in the vessels of the brain; to be again removed by the same reaction, and to return in a similar circle until the morbid condition has been relieved. But what is the effect of this state upon the manifestations of the mind? All the morning the subject of brainular alteration is incapable of intellectual exertion; his spirits are depressed, and his powers of thought inadequate.

To this mental cloud succeeds a transient brightening of the faculties which is suspended by acute pain, and is afterwards characterized by an impossibility of fixing the

attention, until towards evening, when a greater degree of serenity is produced, and the patient probably conduces to his approaching wakefulness by mental occupation ; which, now no longer a burden, goes on cheerily. Now, unless we are wilfully blind, do we not see that the manifestations of mind are under the influence of this peculiar though most simple cerebral disorder ? The infinite wisdom of the Creator has so appointed that the brain can bear much injury with impunity. And it is astonishing to contemplate the degree of mischief which will sometimes go on in its structure without being rendered very obvious by bodily or mental symptoms. By what constitution of the organ this has been provided for is beyond our knowledge, and I seek not to explain it : but we see the fact ; and we derive from the contemplation of it a lesson of adoring gratitude to that holy Being, whose infinite knowledge and goodness have prepared for the operations of the mind an organ of such exquisite delicacy and susceptibility ; yet so endowed, that it can bear with comparative impunity a greater degree of lesion than many other less important viscera. But although this is sometimes the case, yet cerebral disorder is generally marked by some of the following symptoms. Feebleness, or suspension, or perversion of the intimations afforded by the organs of sense.

Mere mental emotion will occasion the tongue to be furred in a few minutes ; vision will be rendered indistinct, and the hearing obtuse ; an emotion of a more powerful kind will suspend the action of the senses altogether : while, under other circumstances, it will so completely pervert them, as that the taste shall be depraved ; the ear shall be assailed by a thousand forms of unreal impression ; spectral images shall float before the eye ; the nose shall be occupied by odours which do not exist ; relative feeling shall be disturbed. Precisely similar effects will often be produced from an impression of primary disease of the brain ; so that, in either case of disorder of that organ, whether it arise from a physical or mental origin, we are prepared for perverted manifestations of mind.

Another form of cerebral disorder consists in hallucination. This manifestation of mental operation often arises from the

former; a perverted image is conveyed through the senses, and represented to the mind, in consequence of the morbid degree of susceptibility of the brain; this impression is brooded over; it is frequently recalled even during sleep; it is associated with other impressions, and grouped with them in some fancied order of perverted and fantastic arrangement; and it becomes so overbearing a sensation, that the patient is convinced of its reality, and carried away by its reiterated impulse.

At another time, the brain forms for itself these delusive images from the involuntarily recollected debris of previous impressions, and their natural, but not always congruous, associations; and thus its action becomes perverted: it ceases to listen to notices conveyed by the external senses, by means of which its previous impressions might have been compared and adjusted; the voice of judgment is not heard, and the patient is absorbed by the reality of his erroneous impressions, and verily believes in the existence of the fancied offspring of a disordered imagination. In this state, actual feelings are disregarded; the morbid images supply their place, and are contemplated as the positive results of sensation. The natural laws of intellect are now superseded; the brain is no longer the obedient servant of the mind; but in the tyranny of its usurpation, subjugates the reasoning powers, and compels them to yield to that human infirmity which attaches itself to the grand prevailing cause that has marred the most perfect earthly work of God, and has rendered that which was originally "very good," now very far gone from original perfection. These hallucinations may be very transient, especially at the commencement of cerebral disease; and a powerful appeal to the mind, judiciously applied, may recall it to the influence of right reason. But if disease should continue, it will soon relapse into the same or similar trains; and if it should advance or increase in intensity, this hallucination may become permanent, and it will then form delirium or insanity.

Another result of cerebral disorder, is that of unconquerable wakefulness. A ceaseless vigilance attacks the patient; "nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," cannot be coaxed to "steep his senses in forgetfulness." It is astonishing how

ong a period will sometimes be passed without repose: for days and weeks together the patient cannot sleep, and, during the whole time, will talk almost incessantly. And yet such is the wisdom of the Almighty Architect in protecting this organ of the mind, that it will not have eventually suffered from this protracted irritation, in a degree at all commensurate with that which would have been produced by the same excited action in other organs of the body. It will be seen, however, at a glance, how favorable must be this state of irritability to the production and fostering of morbid sensorial and intellectual impressions; from which it may be also justly inferred how easily this same state would be induced by a *degree* of the same cause, existing for a long time, but not so intensely as to be called disease—escaping attention under the terms of “restless nights,” and of a “bad sleeper,” till the morbid results have so far accumulated as to be uncontrollable. This form of excitement *may* be followed by a collapse, and destruction of the brain; or it may be rapidly succeeded by congestion, and by a tendency to heavy sleep from which the patient can scarcely be aroused; and from which, if left to himself, this very congestion may proceed on to lethargy, or other deeping shades of cerebral disorder. But there are indications of cerebral malady, which we must particularize as they affect the *intellectual* and *moral* manifestations. One of the first symptoms to be remarked, is an inaptitude for intellectual employment: the patient seeks a frequent change of pursuit; he cannot fix his attention steadily to one object; he cannot reason or think consecutively; he finds it impossible to concentrate his attention on the reasoning of others; his desk and his books are neglected; and he occupies his time with the veriest trifles, rendered important in his estimation, by their association with some perverted images. Moreover, if he has contrived to fix his attention, he soon becomes fatigued; thus showing that, notwithstanding the brain may on some occasions be disposed for over-action, it has not the power of supporting it, but rather that it exhausts itself by attempting to accomplish that to which it is utterly inadequate. Again there is a susceptibility to moral impression, and a disposition to impulsive action, which show that the patient is not to be depended

on. Reason with him, convince his judgment, see his resolution fully taken, apparently with all the immovable determination of conscious right; leave him to act upon these convictions, and the first wave of new impression, or even the recurrence of an old one, will have dissipated his firmness, and he acts in a way diametrically opposed to that on which he had resolved. There exists in him so intense and craving desire after sensation, that it is of little consequence whether it be right or wrong, so it be but sensation; only if one morbid train of ideas shall have become predominant, it will be certain of claiming its supremacy, as soon as the patient gains time to attend to its suggestions.

Sometimes, long before the symptoms are fairly cognizable, there is a slight change of character, or manner, or habit, which ought always to excite attention on the part of friends; as, for instance, where the prudent suddenly become prodigal; or the mild and benevolent, vindictive; or the good-tempered, morose; or the cheerful, desponding; or where confiding candour is exchanged for distrust and suspicion; or the reserved become accessible; or the taciturn, loquacious; or where habits of retirement have been superseded by love of company, or, on the contrary, a desire after society has given place to habits of seclusion and abstraction from mankind; in fact, whenever, in any way, a *marked deviation* from original and established character is observed, then let cerebral disorder be suspected, and it will almost always be found. As it proceeds, and the shadows of departing reason are deepened, delirium will be noticed as a frequent accompaniment, sometimes only as a transient symptom, at others prolonging its insidious visitation; varying much as to character, from the determined and exclusive raving of the maniac to the ever-shifting mutability of him who wanders at random, without end, without guide, and purposeless.

As the disorder of the brain still advances, there may be increasing mental darkness proceeding to a total suppression of intelligence; and the individual becomes a mere wreck of himself; his glory has departed from him, yet be it remembered, even such an extreme case is not hopeless; even this state of misery and destitution admits of relief. The wretched victim of cerebral disorder may yet be restored to himself, to

his duties and the enjoyment of intellectual pleasures, as well as the pursuit of moral worth : and by what means ? Not by any process of reasoning—not by moral suasion—not by didactic appeals to his understanding, or by an impression upon his feelings—not by the arts of rhetoric, the efforts of education, or even, while in that state, the impressiveness of religious motive ; all these would of themselves be utterly unavailing ; but by *remedial measures* directed, not to the *spiritual* principle, which is *not* diseased, but to its organ, which *is* ; in fact, directed to the brain, with its variously associated sympathies.

From this short sketch of the influence of cerebral disorder, we shall infer that a certain state of brainular malady always produces disordered manifestations of mind : that *disordered manifestations* of mind may be always traced back to functional disease of its organ : and that in such states the most unreal images are presented to the mind of the patient with a degree of impressiveness which supersedes the power of reason, and the influence of judgment, and gives them all the attributes of simple and sober truth.

Thus, then, I trust it has been proved that the organ through which the mind acts is material, and that it is liable to be affected by physical causes ; that it is subject to different kinds and degrees of irritation, according to the particular organ which is disturbed, and which forms the first in the chain of morbid action ; that the manifestations of mind will be proportionally disordered, and will partake of the peculiarity of this organic derangement ; and that the brain, being once overpoised from its triune balance of physical, intellectual, and moral agency, perversion of thought and action will be the result ; and that, escaping the guidance of the will, it will continue to think and act on without control, and will become liable to be deceived by disordered mental manifestations, which do in fact result only from a loss of the balance of power ; whether this may have been occasioned by primary or secondary physical irritation, by the overstrained employment of the brain in literary pursuit, or by the influence of powerful and exclusive emotion.

Thus have I made manifest the fallacy of neglecting cerebral disorder, because it is only partial insanity. Verily the

worthy editor of the "Public Ledger" has shewn himself liable to the common frailties of our nature, in "surrendering his judgment to his feelings ; and being borne along on the torrent of passion, he has been dashed on the rocks of error." Let us take warning by his fate ; and let us not, while endeavoring to avoid one extreme, run, as is too often done, into the opposite.

In penning these lines for public perusal, I have been influenced solely by a love of truth ; and a desire to show how a great private evil may become instrumental in promoting the public good.

The man

Who, in this spirit, communes with the Forms
Of Nature : who, with understanding heart,
Doth know and love such objects as excite
No morbid passions, no disquietude,
No vengeance, and no hatred, needs must feel
The joy of that pure principle of Love
So deeply, that, unsatisfied with aught
Less pure and exquisite, he cannot choose
But seek for objects of a kindred love
In Fellow-natures and a kindred joy.
Accordingly, he, by degrees, perceives
His feelings of aversion softened down ;
A holy tenderness pervades his frame.
His sanity of reason not impaired,
Say rather, all his thoughts now flowing clear,
From a clear fountain flowing, he looks round
And seeks for good ; and finds the good he seeks :
Until abhorrence and contempt are things
He only knows by name ; and, if he hear,
From other mouths, the language which they speak,
He is compassionate ; and has no thought,
No feeling which can overcome his love.

Wordsworth.





